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IMPRESSIONISM IN FRANCE.



THE impressionists have thrown into the waste-basket their name of last year. This year they style themselves "Independents," ready to change the name again next year if it should prove to be of no more service to them than that of impressionists. Meanwhile they remain what they were. Of them it may also be said: They have forgotten nothing and learned nothing, with the exception of a new name.

To be brief, the name "Independents" provokes a smile. Independent of what? Independent of whom? To depend on drawing, on color, on modelling, on perspective, like the first scallawag whom one happens to meet, seems to them to be a humiliating and painful thing.

But why blame them? In these times, when the proclamation of all sorts of liberties is almost a matter of etiquette, the liberty which they proclaim is quite as respectable a liberty as any of the others. We have nothing to say against this. To strive for independence has always been the badge of nobility in thoughts and in character.

We shall simply confine ourselves to a statement of the results which grow out of the affirmation of all these independences.

Let us say, then, at the start, that M. Manet, the first inspirer of this curious group, is nothing better than an "opportunist." He, the unquestioned chief of former days, has pushed away with his foot the bark containing his disciples, and nevertheless the bark continues to float without him in its noble independence.

M. Manet having passed into the camp of the crusaders of art with bag and baggage, M. Caillebotte has, with firm hand, assumed the direction of the bark in question, which, without him, might possibly drift away.

Certainly the confidence of the independents could not have been better placed. If we may believe reports coming from undoubted sources, M. Caillebotte, a charming young man of the best education, commands about one hundred thousand francs in rents; — the basis of independence is, therefore, secured.

If M. Caillebotte is devoted enough to the cause to spend his money with princely generosity, to pay for the publicity given to the school of which he has been made the revered chief by acclamation, he will have to pay for it also with his person.

He exhibits no less than thirty-five pictures, magnificently framed, which set forth most energetically his temperament and his convictions. Among these thirty-five canvases there is one which is really the *chef-d'œuvre* of its kind.

A cow in light red mahogany, ornamented with an extraordinary extension mouth-piece, is placed on a crude green grass plot. This cow is accompanied by a little felt goat, which keeps discreetly in the corner of the canvas, so as not to distract the attention which is forcibly directed upon its companion. I dare repeat it: — this is a *chef-d'œuvre*. This fantastic cow, the size of life or but little less, is alone worth the journey to the gallery at 28 l'Avenue de l'Opéra.

Among the other thirty-four canvases of this new pontiff, there are quantities of astonishing boatmen and apocalyptic boat-women, and of prodigious landscapes streaked with unbroken blues and unbroken greens. He has friends whom he loves and who love him, — he seats them upon strange lounges in fantastic positions. The color is made up of the strangest of tints, among which green, black, and red fight Homeric combats. I have even been shown one of his uncles, immovably seated in an arm-chair which threatens ruin, — even his relationship did not suffice to protect this excellent man from the genius of his nephew. He looks sad, but seems nevertheless to pardon him.

Not far from the works of M. Caillebotte are ranged those of M. Monet, — landscapes with green skies and blue verdure, which seem to be lighted by the flame of burning punch. This M. Monet is all that is left of

M. Manet. The almost identity of name undoubtedly led him to take this road, where he remains, thanks to the new protector.

M. Degas is one of the most remarkable of the Corypheuses ; he knows something of drawing, and would not be at a greater loss than any one else to find proper accents and tints. In the sketches which he forces himself to make as slovenly, dirty, and eccentric as possible, one finds here and there patches which show that he is destined sooner or later to abandon the bark, like Messrs. Manet, Renouard, and some of the other "defectionists." It is worth seeing M. Degas's two washerwomen carrying clothes-baskets, his dancing girls at the dancing school, and his pyramidal female singers at a public inn.

We are inclined to believe that M. Degas is playing the lunatic. Is not this a sacrifice offered by his independence to friendship or to love? At all events, the name which M. Degas is making for himself is frequently mentioned. Perhaps some fine day, when he has turned opportunist, he will be having an eye towards the presidency of one of the groups at the Institute.

Meanwhile, M. Degas is raising offspring. One of his brood, who calls himself Forain, is trying to walk in old shoes : here is a marvel of *aplomb* and the complete triumph of independence considered from all points of view. M. Forain will make a name for himself.

Then there is still another, who rejoices in the name of Zaudomenechy. This strange name has in itself quite a pronounced flavor of independence. We have by him a woman of the town, the size of life, with a body entirely independent of the head and the legs. This will do well enough ; and yet M. Caillebotte ought to look after a head hanging by the side of this picture. There is material for a traitor here. It is necessary that the chief should be watchful.

Let him beware also of M. Leboucq, who slurs his sketches so as to appear independent, but who, in spite of himself, depends somewhat on nature, and on the ways of working of those artists who live in doleful dependence.

An American, Miss Mary Cassatt, has also cast her eyes upon strange gods, and forces herself to appear more eccentric than she really is. She will slowly bring up with the pupils of Chaplin, if M. Caillebotte does not look out. We shall pass over a certain number of other figurants whose independence leads them to bedabble canvases with crayon and brushes in the years of their babyhood.

To sum up, this exhibition is pervaded by a quiet and amiable madness, which is in no wise dangerous, and serves to enliven the trade of the gilder and the dealer in canvases and colors. It may be that this is the philanthropic purpose hidden under these little self-styled artistic fancies.

The fashionable world is attracted ; this is an element of gayety at a time when gayety is hardly to be found anywhere, and people are seen to laugh until the tears start out of their eyes as they stop before each canvas. All this is well, — honor to M. Caillebotte !

BERTALL. (In *L'Artiste*.)

I have just read, in the last number of the *Messenger d'Europe* of St. Petersburg, an article by M. Zola on this year's Salon. His views of the tendencies of contemporaneous painting are almost identical with those which I put forth in this chronicle. I was somewhat surprised by the coincidence, but I must confess that I was not displeased.

M. Zola comes to the conclusion, like myself, that the impressionists, although driven out of the Salon by the jury, nevertheless give the impulse to the whole of the new school ; they are everywhere imitated, often unconsciously. The only point on which we differ is this, — that M. Zola applauds the movement quite unreservedly.

According to him the great innovation of the impressionists, painting out of doors, "is the last blow given to classic and romantic painting ; and this is not all : it is the realistic movement begun by Courbet, freed from *technique*, enlarged by analysis, seeking the truth in innumerable effects of light."

As to Manet, "who *was* the leader of the group," M. Zola judges him quite severely.

"His paintings," he says, "are received at the exhibition. He continued the movement after Courbet, thanks to his eye, which is so quick in seizing upon the correct values. His long struggle with the public was caused by the fact that he does not realize easily. I would say that with him the hand is inferior to the eye. He did not know how to create processes for himself ; he remained a pupil in revolt, seeing with great precision what passes in nature, but hardly satisfied that he knew how to render his impressions completely and definitively. This is the reason why, whenever he starts out, you do not know how he is going to reach his goal, . . . you are not convinced that he will get to it. He trusts to chance. When he is successful in a painting, he produces a work above criticism, absolutely truthful, and extraordinarily clever ; but occasionally he goes astray, and then his paintings are imperfect and unequal. In short, a more subjective artist has not been produced during the last fifteen

years. If the technical side equalled in him the truth of the impressions, he would be the great painter of the second half of the nineteenth century."

Here follow general reflections on the importance of form in the arts, which, although exceedingly just in themselves, will surprise some people, as coming from M. Zola. "All impressionists," he says, "sin through their want of technical perfection. In the arts as well as in literature, it is form alone which sustains new ideas and methods. To be a man of talent, one must be able to realize that which lives within one's own breast. He who cannot do this is nothing but a pioneer. To my mind, the impressionists are simply pioneers. For a moment they built great hopes upon Manet; but Manet seems to be exhausted by hasty production: he is contented with an approximation, without studying nature with the passion of the true creator. Indeed, all these artists are too easily satisfied. They wrongfully disdain the solidity of works which have been carefully meditated. Hence the fear is justified, that they will only show the way to the great painter of the future whom the world is waiting for."

M. Zola then studies the influence of the impressionists, that is to say of the naturalists in painting, on those artists who, apparently, are taking quite a different road, but who possess the technical skill wanting in Degas and Pissaro. He calls attention to the fact that M. Bastien-Lepage, who to him seems to be the outcome at once of Courbet and the impressionists, was trained in the studio of Cabanel, which is, indeed, curious enough. Measure the distance, he says, which the pupil of such a master had to travel over, to become what he is at present. Nothing but extraordinary efforts of intelligence could enable him to accomplish such a feat. His temperament drew him on. His superiority over the impressionists consists in this, that he knows how to realize his impressions. He has thoroughly comprehended, that it is only the question of *technique* which separates the public from the innovators. He has, therefore, preserved their spirit and their analytical method, but he has applied himself to expression and to perfecting technical processes.

M. Bastien-Lepage, however, has one great fault in the eyes of M. Zola; he "arouses the enthusiasm of the *bourgeois*." That is one of the things which cannot be pardoned. "I fear," M. Zola goes on to say, "that technical skill will be the ruin of M. Bastien-Lepage. No one can pass through the studio of Cabanel with impunity."

It will be necessary to come to an understanding on this point: — The impressionists will be ruined by want of technical skill; the inheritors of Courbet will be ruined because they have too much of it. Where then is the happy middle?

Gervex also is tainted by original sin. He is a pupil of Cabanel. M. Zola should have added, and of Fromentin. But let that pass. Gervex is another example of the triumph of the naturalistic school in painting. He "realizes what the impressionists desire to express, by an application of the technical skill which he owes to his stay in Cabanel's studio." It follows that the only painters capable of approaching the new ideal are those who received the abominable education of the *École des Beaux Arts*. This acknowledgment is worth making a note of.

M. Zola is quite severe on the artists who do not submit, or submit but little, to the influence of the naturalists. Carolus-Duran pleases the *bourgeois*; let him take care of himself! And we, the public, — let us arm ourselves in defiance against his pictures.

Jean Paul Laurens is nothing but a conscientious artist, a Casimir Delavigne behind time, who is trying to find a middle ground between Delacroix and Horace Vernet.

M. Zola comes to the conclusion, that the roads are open to the painter of genius, in whom the spirit of our epoch is to find its incarnation; it is time for him to be born; his place is prepared for him. As regards the Académie des Beaux Arts, the time is not far when it will be invaded by the impressionists, or, to use a more exact term, by the naturalists. In a phrase which has become celebrated, "The Academy will go over to the naturalists, or it will go out of existence, precisely like the Republic." (*Chronique Parisienne*, in *Revue Suisse*.)

